Interview with Swami Prem Chinmaya

Don't Just Do Something. Sit There.

Darshan Diary

Sunday 4 September 1977.

About a week after his last Darshan, Chinmaya talked about his experience of the three months in Poona. He volunteered to share a letter he wrote to the Reverend Mother of a convent here in Poona to whom he had been referred by a friend in England, In the event of his needing accommodation.

His letter began..

I have just emerged from a 10-day meditation retreat (Vipassana isolation) and found your letter waiting. It has been an amazing experience (being in the ashram). Often painful but more often profoundly beautiful. It is a very joyous place, underlain by a deeply spiritual search, and I'm profoundly moved by the response to the personal demands this man makes on the assortment of young people to be found here.

After three months In the place, using my eyes and ears and openness to the holy spirit, I'm convinced that Osho is a very great man-an enlightened man- and I will have no hesitation in guiding some of my students here after I

return to Cambridge. Already two have come and have been deeply enriched.

The established church can not afford to play the Pharisee over this man. Jesus was also a controversial figure. I have never met anyone who spoke with such authority or whose presence was so authentic. He exults in Jesus and his talks on Jesus are the most beautiful, profound and yet most simple expositions I have ever heard. The church should be ever-open to all experiences, and I think this is one which will expose in it all that which is true and that which is false.

One of the most exciting aspects of this place is the complete cross-section of the people it comprises. There are bums and lay-abouts, respectable middle-class housewives with their children, college professors and qualified, very often very highly qualified professional men of every sort. People serious, people only curious, but all deeply searching for a deeper truth than the world offers.

And all this motley of people is held together, oil and water-prostitutes-I did talk to one-Republicans and very morally upright traditional people-held together by very deep bond of acceptance, quite unlike anything I have experienced in our middle-class church structure.

I imagine the followers of Jesus to have this unconventional flavour about them which caused so many' nice people' to question. And of course, Osho is deeply suspect hear in Poona, and my inquiries have shown that very few critics have ever been here or heard him.

A group of evangelical Christians have even abused me roundly for simply being here. When next the ashram lectures are on Jesus-and there isn't a day goes by when Jesus is not spoken about lovingly-I should be inclined to ask the principle of the theological college to arrange for his ordination candidates-and any other Christians that matter-to hear some of them.

During my stay I have been critically Christian in my bias, and I leave knowing and loving my Lord Jesus more than ever before, and feeling a deep gratitude that such an understanding of him is to be found in this singularly prophetic man who might well be yet another of God's lights in a very dark world.. Indeed, I'm sure he is, because my heart below glows when I meet Jesus more nearly through this man.

I would suggest-very humbly of course-that two of the Osho books would enrich your convent library: one,' the mustard seed', and two,' come follow me'-both on Jesus.

I regret we cannot meet for I leaving a few days, and that the moment until the hour of my departure, I will be again involved in the final spiritual exercise with a group of people whom I have truly come to love. Might intend to return next year with my wife, until then, with love.. ,,

P.S.I write in haste and awkwardly, but I mean all I say and more.

I just mentioned that as an introduction, because it sums up what I feel about having been here.

I asked Chinmaya how he discovered Osho in the first place.

Chinmaya: Well, I am a priest and involved in the academic life (as chaplain in Churchill College, Cambridge University). In my training I came across the Kalptaru which I later learned was and Osho centre. I went there to do encounter and other groups. I met a very interesting man there called Veeresh, and as he talked I felt very excited about him and about what he said of the ashram. One day I read a few passages out of ' The Mustard Seed', took it home and read then re-read it. That's where it all started.

Chinmaya, with the blessings of his wife, decided this was the time to visit Poona. The finances trip he sold his beloved Steinway grand piano. He'd heard rumours about Osho which only served, unwittingly, to whet his appetite!

One of the professors and two or three other lecturers-one of whom had a Bombay connection-said that this man was a phoney, a very controversial figure. His main Interest was making money, the place was licentious and they wouldn't advise me to go. But having read his books, I knew what they had thought of as licentiousness was freedom. Was prepared to find this in error.

Also I felt that there was something controversial about this man and so he's very Jesus-like. If they had said,' Yes, go because he's a very interesting man and you'll learn a great deal from him; he's got good teaching', and if they'd all been for him, knowing the kind of conventional dons they were, I think I would have been turned off! But because they had very much the same attitude as I would have expected 2000 years ago of the respectable person in Palestine, it made me all the more keen to come!

So having got here I was very careful and cagey. I was trying to be unbiased, and I resisted seeing Osho for about three weeks or more. I was just listening to people, to lectures, watching, feeling the ashram, getting over my bewilderment of being here and the strangeness of it all. Yet I knew that if this were good it would prevail that if this were bull shit then I would soon discover it.

Maneesha: What were your first impressions of the ashram?

Chinmaya: My first impression was' Gosh, maybe they are right!' because I came to the gate and saw this great marble thing and the bottom dropped out of my belly when I saw this great chandelier dangling in the doorway. Not only was it expensive but it seemed to me so gross! (Laughter) It seemed so flamboyant as if some monkeys had seen it in they drawing room and thought,' We'll have one in our forest!' (much laughter) So I began to count up' I wonder how much this door cost with the brass things on it and all the marble and signs'. They were out of countenance with any thing I thought was an approach to God. So really I had a negative reaction to begin with.

After a week or so my suspicion of Osho were completely gone. There was no doubt about the impact that this man made on me after the first week, but my suspicion of the ashram still remained. I felt there was some incongruity, but gradually things began to make sense to me and I saw that nothing that was happening in the ashram was in anyway derogatory to his status as a person.

One of the things that I found about the ashram is the kind of people who come here. I have met some very fine people, very discerning, very intelligent, very committed people, and as I said in my letter, one of the exciting things about the ashram is how all the Toms and not Dicks and the Harries.. ..And I mentioned a prostitute. I met an ex-prostitute in my group and she was lovely, absolutely lovely, and we could relate as human beings. I didn't put her in any category.

And a met a fellow colleague from another university, but I didn't look upon him as a reader in philosophy. It was just as in Galilee where everybody was held together by this person. I make the distinction that the Church is so bloody middle-class, and you've got to be so *good* to belong to the church. You've got to be good, you can't get in till your good. But here there is no need to be good, and indeed, it's almost an advantage not to be good! (Laughter)

So everything here measured up against my expectations.. ..not my expectations–I'd like to withdraw the word–my understanding of the Gospel, because I've always been a rebel. I've got further and further away from the centre and I'm holding on to the establishment by my fingernails now.

Maneesha: What was the rebellion–that you felt the established church wasn't Christ?

Chinmaya: Yes. Somehow Jesus has got encrusted in the system so that we'll worship him but he's dead. We don't need to follow him; he's dead. Somehow looking at Jesus from the mess of the institution, I see Jesus as being other than the Jesus was worshipped in church, whose good and blue–I had and blonde–haired.

I think I can see Osho as a Jesus–even if he does have a big air–conditioned car and all this. I can see him as a Jesus–figure for this age.

Maneesha: What particularly appeals to you in what Osho says about Jesus?

Chinmaya: Osho on Jesus is superb. I was very moved, especially at a critical time in my experience as chaplain at Cambridge, about getting lost. You know, we talk about being 'the lost sheep' but most people never really get lost. I understood through Osho for the first time what it is to really get lost, to be in a maze, to not be a pretending sinner. To be absolutely derelict and lost is something which the average Christian doesn't want to be. He might talk about his sins but he never really gets lost. It came to me as a kind of revelation–but yes, one's really got to be lost. That was one of the chapters in one of the books that was really indicating to me that I've got to go and see, and read more, about this man.

Maneesha: Can you talk about meditation and prayer?

Chinmaya: Well, I have always suspected that prayer was again an expression of the ego' Lord, make my Mother well'–and it could even be,' Help me pass my examinations.' Even praying compassionately for other people seem to me in some curious

way, to be getting back to oneself. So for the last two years I have been involved in a meditation of my own making. Although I didn't know it, I was unwittingly doing what Osho says–emptying my head of my mind. I only got that message when I came here, but this is the very essence–to empty oneself. One phrase of Osho's is always with me like a mantra: 'When you are, God is not. When God is, you are not.' So it seems to me that just as one creates a vacuum, and the more open the vacuum, the more air rushes in, so if one creates a vacuum in one's head getting rid of all the bullshit, God comes in and possesses you. You are not–he is!

As a consequence of reading Osho's books my meditation has become richer and deeper. Its even more rich now that I've learned a few techniques from people I've learned to love and respect–people like S. The fact that people like him are here is another recommendation. Where the pearl is you'll see the merchants looking for it.

Maneesha: Can you talk about what sannyasins to you?

Chinmaya: I can see why one should dress up in this ridiculous, colour because it is ridiculous, but to say one surrenders without any external expression of it is awfully easy. I can see the need to change, to change direction, and changing the name is a good symbol of it. Having the mala around my neck seemed to me to be a kind of extreme egocentricity on the part of Osho, but I feel this is not so now. I can't explain It, but being a sannyasin means in some ways, a dedication, a declaration of your own earnestness, something not to be taken lightly.

Of course I believe in the man. Let's eliminate the word 'believe'; I somehow know without knowing how I know, that this man speaks a great truth. And whether he's Christ or not, I don't care. I'll just follow him because he's got this richness that I want very much.

Maneesha: Do you think something on the scale and of the nature of Christianity is going to emerge from what is happening around Osho?

Chinmaya: No, I don't think it will be like Christianity, because people are sick of Christianity, people are sick of Mohammedanism, people are sick of institutions. I don't think there's going to be another 'ism' when he dies. I feel there's no church going to emerge except a kind of incognito church, an underswell that's going to releaven the roots.

I feel somehow that just as the Christians' always talking about Jesus is not enough, it is not enough for sannyasins to talk about what a great man Osho is. A sannyasin has got to start being an Osho. We've got to be Osho's. We have got to be disciples in the sense that we are walking Osho's, even though in a lesser degree.